

BRIEFING STATEMENT

PREPARED FOR: NWRS LEADERSHIP TEAM

DATE: May 24, 2018

TITLE: NEPA/Policy Capacity in the NWRS

ISSUE: This memo outlines options for providing capacity the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) needs to provide consistent and effective guidance and support to the Regions and field to keep up with new and evolving changes in National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other policies and the large increase in workload to meet Departmental priorities. Transforming our NEPA and policy capacity, support, guidance, and systems will have long-term benefits beyond responding to immediate policy priorities.

BACKGROUND: We have lost most of our planning and policy capacity in the NWRS over the last several years. This staff was historically responsible for helping NWRS staff navigate National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process requirements, writing NEPA documents, assisting in Section 106 consultations under the National Historic Preservation Act, Section 7 Consultations under the Endangered Species Act, writing CCPs and Stepdown Plans, Compatibility Determinations, public outreach and navigating other planning and policy issues that arose. Since the Department signed Secretarial Order No. 3355: Streamlining National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Reviews and Implementation of Executive Order 13807 (S.O. 3355), the Department has been engaged in a focused effort to transition the way that bureaus comply with NEPA. As part of this effort, the Department continues to direct bureaus to make major changes in the way we have traditionally complied with NEPA by instituting page limits and timelines, tracking NEPA documents, changing EIS project management and Department review and approval, and revising agency guidance and training.

STATUS/KEY POINTS:

In order to keep up with directives from the Department, the NWRS needs a team of support and guidance to help navigate these changes and meet mandated timelines and page limits. Additionally, the NWRS is planning on expanding hunting and fishing and other outdoor recreational opportunities on many of our refuges as a result of Secretarial Orders 3347, 3356 and 3366. These efforts will require compliance with NEPA, and possibly changes to CCPs and/or Step-down Plans, and Compatibility Determinations. There is and will continue to be a need for NEPA, planning, and policy support to meet these directives and make these sweeping changes in the NWRS in the desired timeframes.

ACTIONS

Options will be presented with recommended staffing, staffing structure, contracting, and other capacity needed to meet the needs of the NWRS, legal mandates, and Departmental priorities. We will continue to coordinate and maintain the internal NEPA website of resources and disseminate Departmental NEPA guidance as it is released.

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